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Crimson Shadows

Dedicated to Kirk Dilbeck

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SPAWN created by Todd McFarlane

SPAWN DARK AGES 4 SUMMARY:

Led by Lord Covenant, the downtrodden army of peasants meets on the battlefield against Lord Rivalen's army commanded by the dark Guy DuBlanc. Soon disgusted by the bloodshed, Spawn declares the battle over. Later, Baron Rivalen meets with Spawn and tells him that his sister, the Baron's wife, has died. Downcast, Spawn then leaves Rhyll to seek his fate in the great world, oblivious that Cog had given the relic of the true cross to the son he had unknowingly sired.

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PARDON MOI, GOOD MONSIEUR. CAN YOU SPARE A BIT OF COIN FOR AN OLD FOOL? WOULD YOU BE SO KIND?
PLEASE. THIS IS NOT CHARITY I ASK. NO, NO, NO...
I AM OLD AND CRIPPLE, THAT IS TRUE. THAT IS TRUE, YES. BUT I HAVE SOMETHING I CAN TRADE. SOMETHING I CAN SELL. INDEED I DO.
AH, YOU ARE INTRIGUED, ARE YOU NOT, MONSIEUR? I SEE IT IN YOUR SMILE. WHAT COULD AN OLD BAG OF DUNG HAVE TO SELL. HUH?
WELL I WAS NOT ALWAYS LIKE THIS. NO, FOR CERTAIN I WAS NOT.
AND THEREIN HANGS THE TALE, NO? I'LL TRADE MY TALE THEN, FOR WHATEVER YOU CAN SPARE FROM YOUR PURSE. WHEN I AM DONE, I BELIEVE YOU WILL AGREE IT IS A BARGAIN...

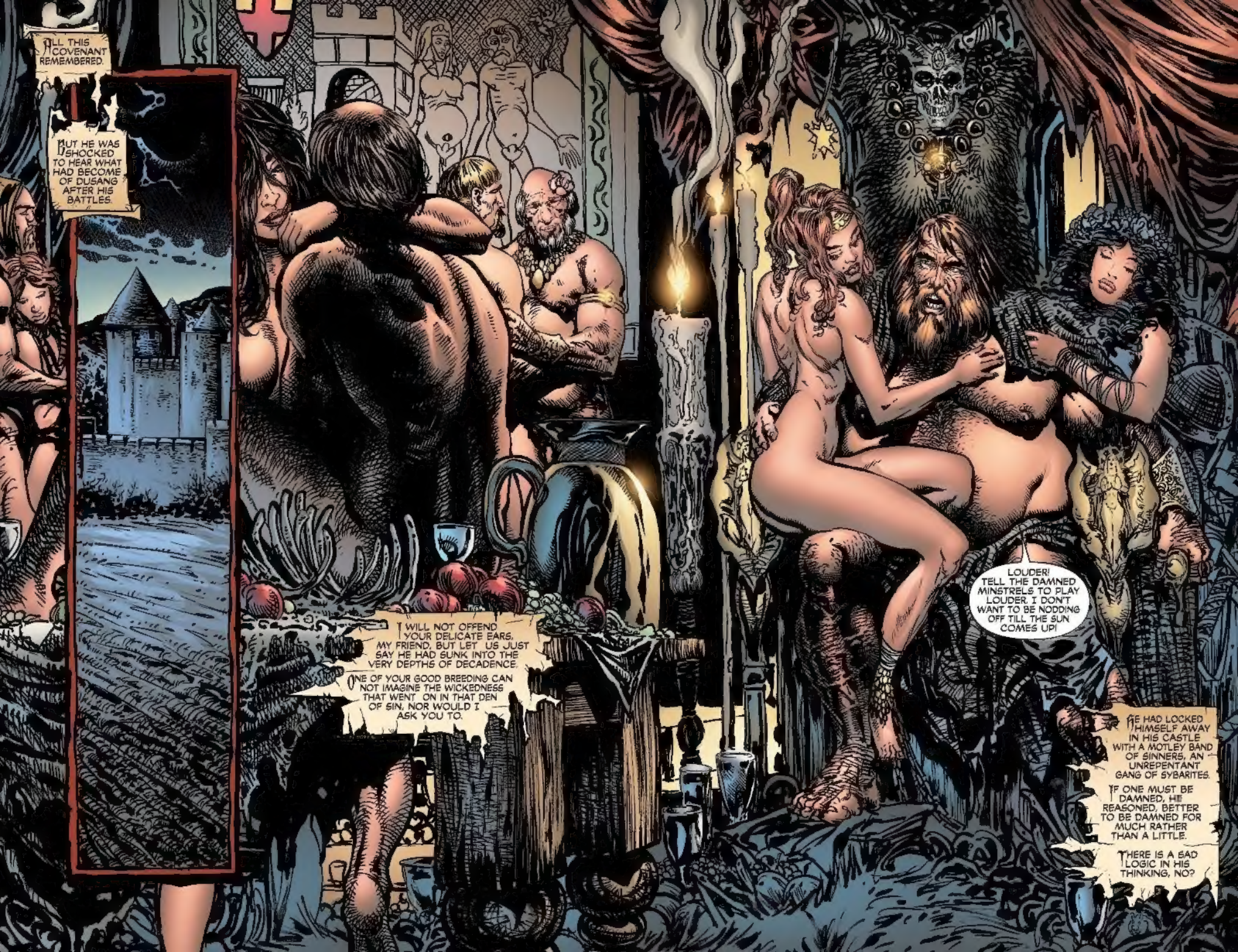
DO YOU BELIEVE IN GHOSTS, MONSIEUR? DO YOU BELIEVE THE DEAD COME BACK TO HAUNT THE LIVING, TO PUNISH THEM FOR THEIR CRIMES?
I MUST SAY THAT I DID NOT. I THOUGHT SUCH NONSENSE TO BE MERE BEDTIME FODDER FOR NAUGHTY CHILDREN, OR FOOLISH DISTRACTION FOR THE ADDLE-BRAINED.
BUT I HAVE SEEN IT HAPPEN. I HAVE SEEN MY SINS WALKING ON TWO FEET, CHASING AFTER ME.
BY MY OATH, IT IS TRUE.
MY TALE BEGINS, AS OLD MEN'S TALES INVARIABLY DO, MANY, MANY YEARS AGO...

MORE MULLED WINE, DOVE. AND KEEP IT COMING. 'TIS A WHORE OF A NIGHT OUT, IT IS. TRAVELED SEVEN LEAGUES IN THE RAIN BEFORE WE SAW YOUR LIGHT.
BULL-DUNG.
WELL... FIVE LEAGUES, AT LEAST. I WARN YOU ALL, TRAVEL NOT BY THE OLD ST. DOMANI ROAD, FROM AVIGNON.
AYE. IT IS A GODLESS PLACE. WE WERE TURNED OUT FROM EVERY HEARTH. NO PLACE TO GIVE SHELTER OR FOOD. PLAGUE THEY SAY. EMPTY AND DESERTED AS THE OLD ROMAN CITY.
RIGHT DUCHY OF THE BASTARDS. WHOSE LANDS WERE THOSE, PIERRE?
OH, LET'S SEE. WHAT WAS IT? OH, RIGHT... DUSANG. CHRETIEN DU SANG DE LA CROIX. MAD AS A RABBIT THEY SAY.
THE STRANGER IN THE CORNER HEARD THE CURSED NAME AND HIS BLOOD STIRRED. HIS THOUGHTS FLEW BACK TO ANOTHER TIME, ANOTHER LIFE...

LORD COVENANT HAD ONCE FOUGHT IN THE POPE'S WAR AGAINST THE INFIDEL HORDES.
BEWARE THE MAN WHO BELIEVES IN HIS CAUSE.
REPENT BEFORE THE WOUNDS OF CHRIST, THAT YOU MAY BE SAVED IN THE WORLD TO COME.
FAH! DIE, YOU COVETOUS INVADER PIG!
DIE!
ULP!
WELL, LORD COVENANT, I DO BELIEVE YOU OWE ME AN ALE.
I OWE YOU MORE THAN THAT, MY FRIEND. I BELIEVE I OWE YOU MY LIFE.
BAH. YOUR LIFE IS OF LITTLE USE TO ME, MY BOY. BUT A GOOD ALE, IN A PROPER PUB... THAT SOUNDS LIKE PARADISE.
IT IS YOURS THEN. IF WE EVER MAKE IT BACK TO CHRISTENDOM, I SHALL SHOWER IN IT.
I'LL HOLD YOU TO THAT, MOM AMI! NOW LET US GO. IT WOULD NOT DO TO LET THEM WIN THIS WAR WITHOUT US.

THE TWO MEN HAD MET ON THE ROAD OUT OF FRANCE. YOUNG COVENANT WAS NAIVE AND GREEN, NEVER HAVING BEFORE LEFT HIS NATIVE ENGLAND.
HE WAS A GOOD LAD, IF A LITTLE TOO TRUSTING. BUT HE CARRIED SOMETHING HIDDEN INSIDE HIM, SOME DARK SECRET.
RUMOR WAS IT HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH A GIRL.
OLD DUSANG WAS ANOTHER STORY. A RIGHT OLD RASCAL HE WAS. QUICK WITH A TALE AND A GOOD WORD, HE WAS WORLDLY AND WELL TRAVELED.
A WEALTHY MAN, HE BROUGHT MANY RETAINERS, AND CASKS OF WINE AND SALTED MEATS ON THE TREK.
THE CRUSADES WERE BUT A HOLIDAY TO HIM.
LET ME TELL YOU, LAD, YOU'VE NEVER LIVED TILL YOU HAVE BEEN BAPTIZED IN THE BROTHELS OF PARIS.
IF BISHOPS AND VICARS WANT MEN TO BELIEVE IN THE GENEROSITY OF GOD AND THE EXISTENCE OF MIRACLES, THEY WOULD DO WELL TO SEND THEM TO SEE MY SAINTED MARIE.
SHE'LL MAKE THE CRIPPLE WALK AGAIN! HAH!

DUSANG WAS ONE OF THOSE LOVABLE ROGUES, WHOM ONE NATURALLY TRUSTS, BUT WHOM ONE WOULD BE WISE NOT TO TRUST TOO MUCH...


ALL THIS COVENANT REMEMBERED.
BUT HE WAS SHOCKED TO HEAR WHAT HAD BECOME OF DUSANG AFTER HIS BATTLES.
I WILL NOT OFFEND YOUR DELICATE EARS, MY FRIEND, BUT LET US JUST SAY HE HAD SUNK INTO THE VERY DEPTHS OF DECADENCE.
ONE OF YOUR GOOD BREEDING CAN NOT IMAGINE THE WICKEDNESS THAT WENT ON IN THAT DEN OF SIN, NOR WOULD I ASK YOU TO.
LOUDER! TELL THE DAMNED MINSTRELS TO PLAY LOUDER. I DON'T WANT TO BE NODDING OFF TILL THE SUN COMES UP!
HE HAD LOCKED HIMSELF AWAY IN HIS CASTLE WITH A MOTLEY BAND OF SINNERS, AN UNREPENTANT GANG OF SYBARITES.
IF ONE MUST BE DAMNED, HE REASONED, BETTER TO BE DAMNED FOR MUCH RATHER THAN A LITTLE.
THERE IS A SAD LOGIC IN HIS THINKING, NO?

AH, WHAT IS THIS? HMM... I SEE MORE HAVE COME TO HEAR MY TALE. VERY WELL, YOU MAY LISTEN, BUT DON'T EXPECT ME TO START OVER, AYE?
AS I WAS SAYING, WAR CAN DO MANY THINGS TO A MAN. MAKE HIM A HERO OR MAKE HIM A MONSTER. FOR SOME IT DOES BOTH.
YOU MAY FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE THAT SOME KNIGHTS WENT OFF TO BATTLE WITH SOMETHING LESS THAN PIETY IN THEIR HEARTS, BUT BY MY TROTH, IT IS SO.
AYE, I SPEAK OF GREED, MY FRIENDS.
THERE WAS A RUMOR THAT TURK MERCHANTS WERE SWALLOWING COINS AND PRECIOUS GEMS TO HIDE THEM FROM THE ARMIES OF CRUSADERS.
SOME SOLDIERS TOOK IT UPON THEMSELVES TO SEE IF THE RUMOR WAS TRUE.
ZOUNDS! WHAT MANNER OF GODLESS BEAST ARE YOU?
YOU ARE A SOLDIER IN THE ARMY OF CHRIST! HOW DARE YOU PRACTICE SUCH BLASPHEMY?!
WHEN LORD COVENANT HAD FINISHED GIVING THE SCOUNDREL A SOUND THRASHING, HE THOUGHT FOR A WHILE OF RETURNING HOME.
HE HAD SEEN MANY ATROCITIES IN HIS CAMPAIGNS. MANY ACTS THAT WERE CLEARLY NOT THE WILL OF GOD. AND IF THEY DO NOT BUT GOD'S WILL, WHY STAY AT ALL?
I SHOULD HAVE YOU HUNG FOR A WITCH!
EASY THERE, MY FRIEND. DON'T WASTE YOUR BREATH ON HIM...
BUT IN THE END IT WAS DUSANG WHO CONVINCED HIM TO STAY. "THINK OF THE BIG PICTURE," HE TOLD HIM.

THINK OF THE GRAND MISSION THEY WERE ON, AND OF THE RIGHTEOUS CAUSE FOR WHICH THEY FOUGHT.
MUSANG SPOKE OF HOW GLORIOUS IT WOULD BE WHEN THEY RODE INTO THE CITY OF JERUSALEM, AND FREED IT FROM THE HEATHEN GRASP OF SALADIN.
HOW THE KINGDOMS OF CHRISTENDOM WOULD SOON DEFEAT THE INFIDEL, AND ON THAT DAY WOULD COME THE JUBILEE.
AND CHOIRS OF ANGELS SHALL SING OUT THEIR PRAISES, AND THEIR NAMES WOULD BE CARVED ONTO THE THRONE OF GOD, SO THAT NONE, IN A THOUSAND THOUSAND YEARS, WOULD EVER FORGET WHAT THEY HAD DONE...

ONE GRAY DAWN IT WAS THAT LORD COVENANT AWOKE FEELING RESTLESS. HAVING SAID HIS MORNING PRAYERS, HE TOOK A WALK AROUND THE CAMP.
HE NOTED DUSANG'S TENT WAS EMPTY. PERHAPS HIS WILD FRIEND HAD LEARNED THE VALUE OF PIETY AND HAD RISEN EARLY HIMSELF
BUT SOMETHING HUNG IN THE AIR THAT MORNING, LIKE A SWORD DANGLING BY A THREAD
IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE HE HEARD THE RUMBLING OF ENEMY HORSE HOOVES. FELT THE SHAKING OF THE GROUND
COVENANT SHOUTED OUT ALARMS BUT BY THEN IT WAS ALREADY TOO LATE
THE BATTLE WAS SWIFT AND BLOODY AND IT WAS DECISIVE. WHEN IT WAS OVER, ONLY A HANDFUL OF COVENANT'S FELLOW CRUSADERS ESCAPED WITH THEIR LIVES.
THE ENEMY TROOPS HAD SWOOPED DOWN IN THE EARLY MORNING AND DECIMATED THE ARMY IN THEIR SLEEP. A COWARDLY AMBUSH.
SOMEONE HAD GIVEN AWAY THEIR LOCATION FOR A FEW CARTS FULL OF TRINKETS.

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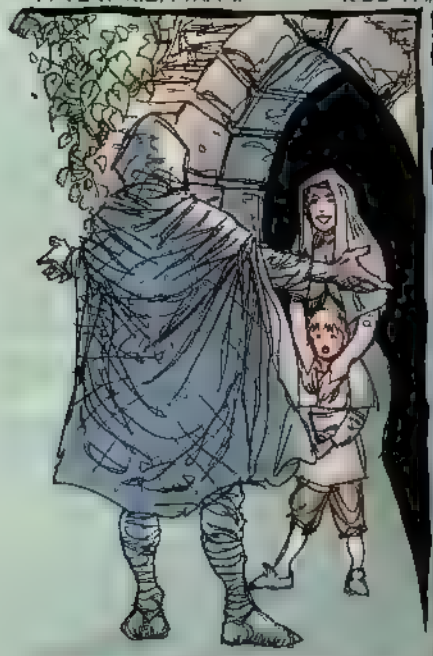
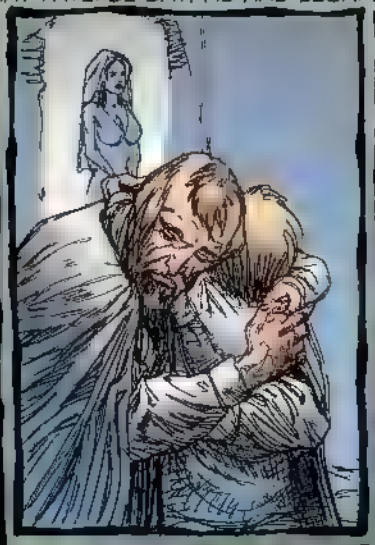
DUSANG RETURNED FROM THE CRUSADES A VERY RICH MAN.

WHEN ASKED, HE SAID THAT HE WAS LUCKY TO RETURN AT ALL BY PROVIDENCE, HE SAID, HAVING GONE ON AN EARLY MORNING RIDE THAT FATEFUL DAY, HE HAD ESCAPED THE INFIDEL ATTACK.





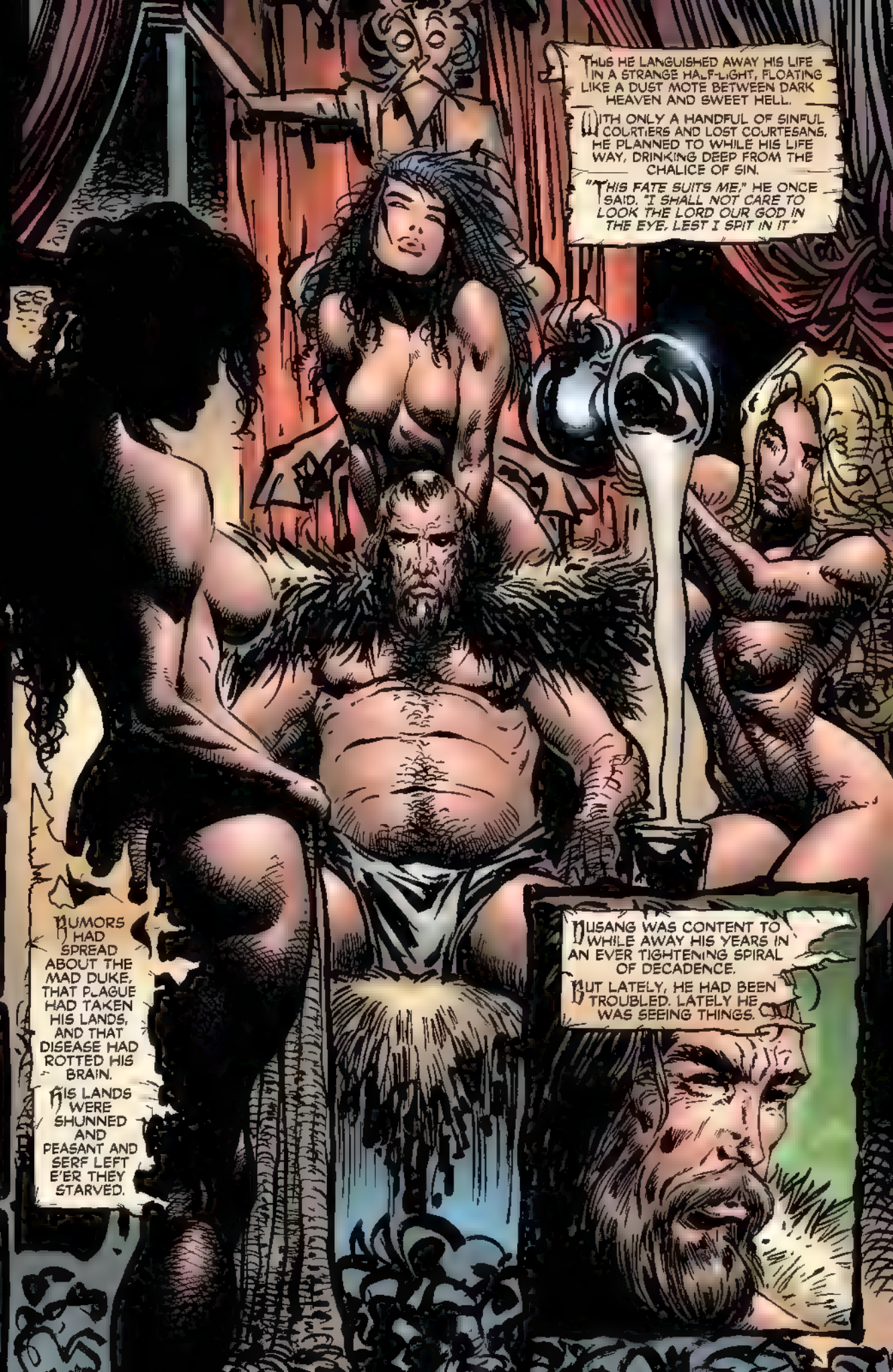
NO ONE ELSE HAD SURVIVED, HE REPORTED.

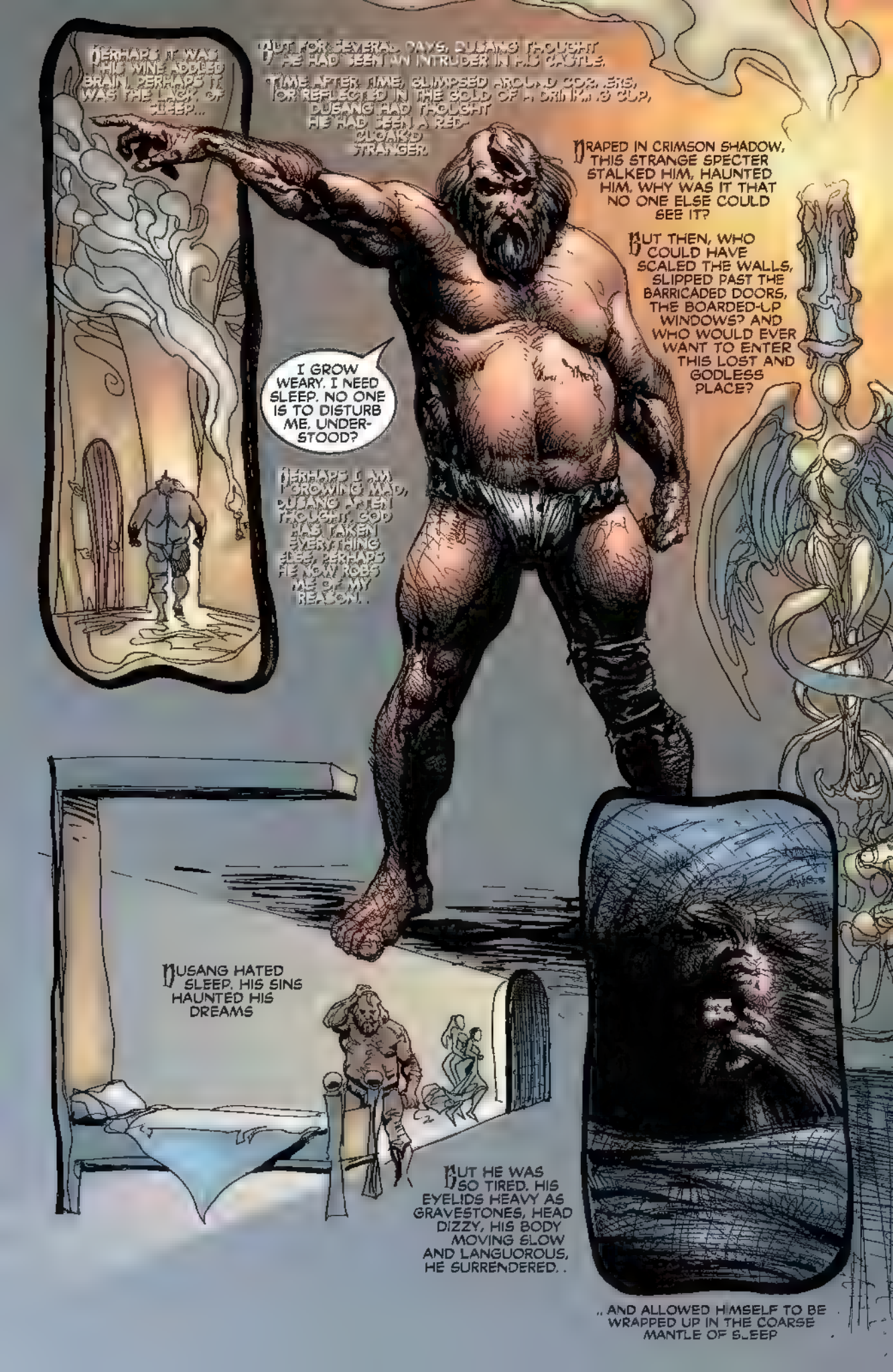
HE SAID THAT GOD MUST HAVE BEEN LOOKING OUT FOR HIM.

BUT DUSANG'S "GOOD FORTUNE" WAS NOT TO LAST.

ACROSS HIS LANDS, HIS CROPS FAILED, WHILE HIS NEIGHBORS HAD BOUNTIFUL HARVESTS...

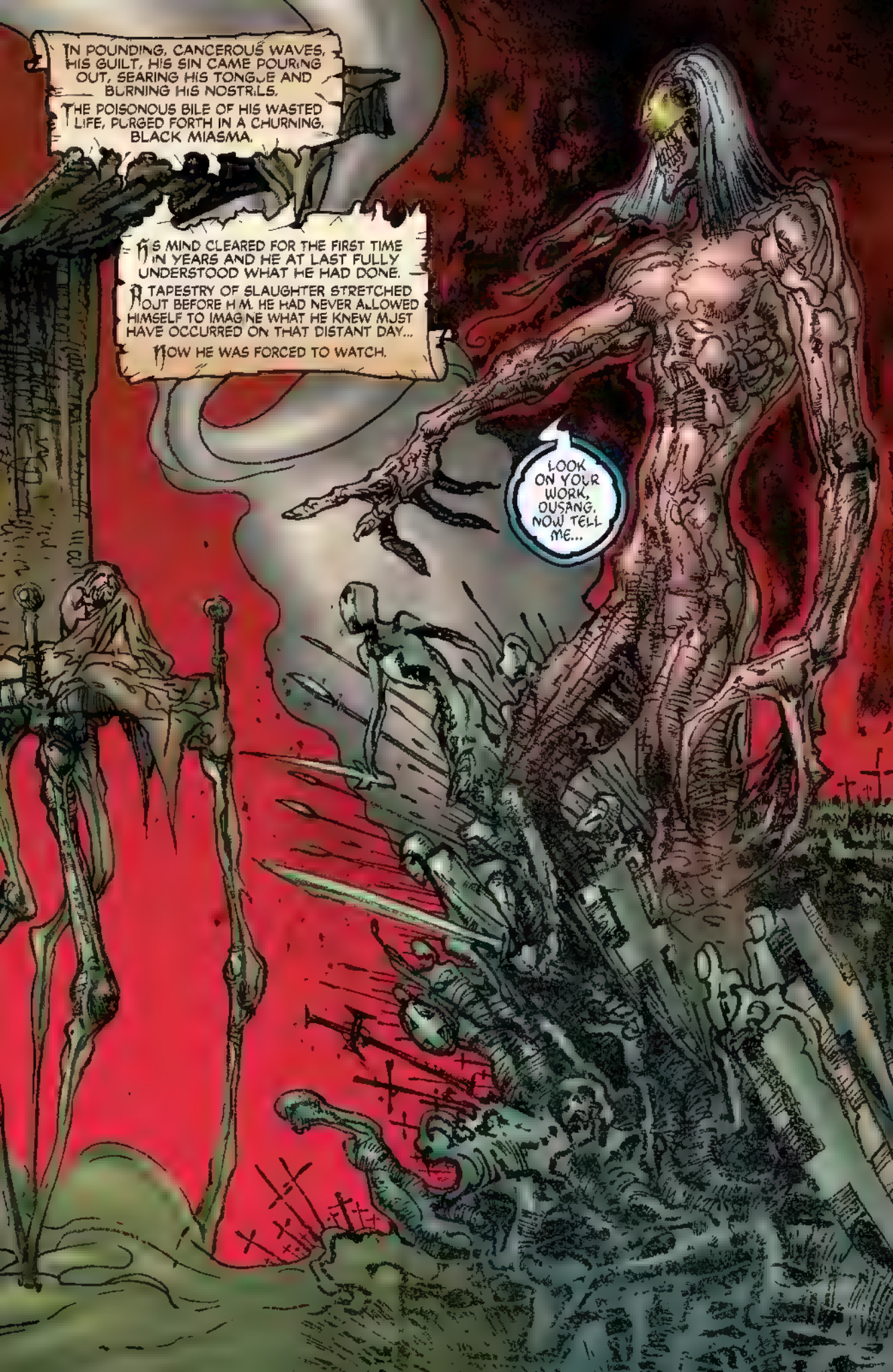
HIS ONLY SON AND HEIR, PHILLIPE, HAD DROWNED MYSTERIOUSLY.
SIX MONTHS LATER, DUSANG'S WIFE DIED OF CONSUMPTION.
GOD HAD PUNISHED HIM FOR HIS CRIMES. WELL, THE OLD FOOL WOULD HAVE NONE OF IT. GOD, HE DECIDED, WAS NO LONGER WELCOME IN HIS REALM.
HE FILLED THE GRAIN STORES AND CELLARS OF HIS CASTLE TO THE BRIM, AS IF PREPARING FOR SIEGE.
HE TURNED OUT ALL BUT A VERY FEW OF THE SERVANTS AND LOCKED HIMSELF AWAY.
GOD INDEED WAS DEAD, HE PRONOUNCED. OR AT THE VERY LEAST IN BLIND OLD FOOL.
THE WORLD WAS NO LONGER HIS DOMINION.


Thus he languished away his life in a strange half-light, floating like a dust mote between dark heaven and sweet hell.
With only a handful of sinful courtiers and lost courtesans, he planned to while his life way, drinking deep from the chalice of sin.
"This fate suits me," he once said. "I shall not care to look the Lord our God in the eye, lest I spit in it."
Rumors had spread about the mad duke, that plague had taken his lands, and that disease had rotted his brain.
His lands were shunned and peasant and serf left e'er they starved.
Nusang was content to while away his years in an ever tightening spiral of decadence.
But lately, he had been troubled. Lately he was seeing things.


PERHAPS IT WAS THE WINE ADDLED BRAIN. PERHAPS IT WAS THE LACK OF SLEEP...
BUT FOR SEVERAL DAYS, DUSANG THOUGHT HE HAD SEEN AN INTRUDER IN HIS CASTLE.
TIME AFTER TIME, GLIMPSED AROUND CORNERS, OR REFLECTED IN THE GOLD OF A DRINKING CUP, DUSANG HAD THOUGHT HE HAD SEEN A RED-CLOAKED STRANGER.
DRAPED IN CRIMSON SHADOW, THIS STRANGE SPECTER STALKED HIM, HAUNTED HIM. WHY WAS IT THAT NO ONE ELSE COULD SEE IT?
BUT THEN, WHO COULD HAVE SCALED THE WALLS, SLIPPED PAST THE BARRICADED DOORS, THE BOARDED-UP WINDOWS? AND WHO WOULD EVER WANT TO ENTER THIS LOST AND GODLESS PLACE?
I GROW WEARY. I NEED SLEEP. NO ONE IS TO DISTURB ME. UNDERSTOOD?
PERHAPS I AM GROWING MAD, DUSANG AFTEN THOUGHT. GOD HAS TAKEN EVERYTHING ELSE. PERHAPS HE NOW ROBS ME OF MY REASON...
DUSANG HATED SLEEP. HIS SINS HAUNTED HIS DREAMS
BUT HE WAS SO TIRED. HIS EYELIDS HEAVY AS GRAVESTONES, HEAD DIZZY, HIS BODY MOVING SLOW AND LANGUOROUS, HE SURRENDERED..
.. AND ALLOWED HIMSELF TO BE WRAPPED UP IN THE COARSE MANTLE OF SLEEP

THERE ARE NO WORDS TO DESCRIBE THE HORRORS THAT AWAITED HIM ON THE PLUTONIAN SHORES OF DREAM.
WHY...? CHRETIEN DUSANG DE LA CROIX... WHY...?
A GHOSTLY CHORUS OF THE DEAD, CRYING OUT TO HIM.
EACH ONE SPEAKING OUT HIS NAME IN GRAVE, SOLEMN TONES.
"SIR HENRY OLDSTAFF OF LYONNE..."
"LORD SUTCH OF CAMBRIA"
"SIR PERRIS OF AMELOT"
"LORD PLENY THE ELDER."
"LORD PLENY THE ELDER"
"SQUIRE HOBBS OF SALISBURY"
DUSANG SHIVERED DESPITE HIS BEDCLOTHES, EACH NAME DRIVING A NAIL THROUGH HIS HEART
COUNTLESS MEN, SOME GOOD AND SOME OTHER WISE, WHO HAD LOST THERE LIVES TO HIS DECEIT.

HE QUAKED BEFORE THE ACCUSING FINGER OF THE APPARITION. A PHANTOM ARMY ASSEMBLED AT HIS FEET.
A DEBT IS OWED, DU SANG. IT MUST BE SETTLED.
THERE IS A PRICE FOR EVERYTHING, IS THERE NOT, MOM AMI?
FEAR DEVOURED HIM. HE COULD FEEL IT BURROWING THROUGH THE VERY MARROW OF HIM.
SHAKING, CONVULSING, STRUGGLING TO GET OUT.


IN POUNDING, CANCEROUS WAVES, HIS GUILT, HIS SIN CAME POURING OUT, SEARING HIS TONGUE AND BURNING HIS NOSTRILS.
THE POISONOUS BILE OF HIS WASTED LIFE, PURGED FORTH IN A CHURNING, BLACK MIASMA.
HIS MIND CLEARED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS AND HE AT LAST FULLY UNDERSTOOD WHAT HE HAD DONE.
A TAPESTRY OF SLAUGHTER STRETCHED OUT BEFORE HIM. HE HAD NEVER ALLOWED HIMSELF TO IMAGINE WHAT HE KNEW MUST HAVE OCCURRED ON THAT DISTANT DAY...
NOW HE WAS FORCED TO WATCH.
LOOK ON YOUR WORK, OUSANG. NOW TELL ME...

WAS IT WORTH IT?
WHO? WHO ARE YOU?
DON'T YOU RECOGNIZE ME, FATHER?
PHILLIPE? NO! YOU ARE JUST SOME CURSED SPECTER, SOME SPITEFUL APPARITION.
BUT YOU GO TOO FAR. LEAVE MY CHILD OUT OF THIS. HIS DEATH WAS AN ACCIDENT. I SHALL TAKE FULL ACCORD OF THE OTHERS, BUT NOT MY SWEET BOY...
OH NO. NOT AGAIN. NOT BY MY HAND...
YES, DUSANG. ALL BY YOUR HAND. THERE IS NAUGHT YOU CAN TOUCH THAT YOU DO NOT DESTROY. THERE IS A PRICE FOR EVERYTHING.
WHO ARE YOU? WHAT IS TO BECOME OF ME?
YOU SPARED MY LIFE ONCE, SO I SHALL SPARE YOURS. I DOUBT YOU SHALL THANK ME FOR IT.
COVENANT? IS THAT YOU WHO HAUNTS ME, MON AMI?
COVENANT IS DEAD, MON AMI.

HUSANG AWOKE WITH A START FROM HIS TROUBLED DREAMS, BEDCLOTHES SOUR WITH HIS SWEAT.
IT WAS BUT A NIGHTMARE, A PASSING PHANTASM FROM THE DARK TRANSOM OF DREAM.
WHAT A FOOLISH OLD MAN, TO BE SCARED SO BY THINGS THAT HAVE NO WEIGHT, NO MATTER.
HE COULD HEAR LAUGHTER AND REVELRY FROM THE GREAT HALL. NOTHING HAD CHANGED.
HE WOULD GO JOIN THE OTHERS, PERHAPS AMUSE THEM WITH THIS TALE OF SILLY VISIONS WHICH HAD DANCED BEFORE HIS SLEEPING EYE.
BUT AS HE SHUFFLED DOWN THE COLD, STONY CORRIDOR, HE HEARD SCREAMING AND SHOUTING.
AND HE HEARD THE AGONY OF MEN IN THEIR DEATH THROES.

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IT WAS A PAGEANT OF SLAUGHTER THAT HAD GREETED HIS EYES. HIS COMRADES DEAD, OR DYING IN TWITCHING FITS OF PAIN UPON THE FLOOR, DRAPED OVER CHAIRS.
"THE WINE," ONE OF THEM WHISPERED.
DUSANG INSPECTED IT. HAD IT GONE BAD? WAS IT POISONED? THE TRUTH WASN'T HARD TO GUESS.
HE NOW HAD NO DOUBTS THAT THE SPECTER OF HIS DREAM WAS REAL.
THAT A GHOST HAD COME IN THE NIGHT TO WREAK JUDGEMENT UPON HIM AND HIS UNHOLY HOUSEHOLD.
THAT NO BAR, NO MATTER HOW STOUT, COULD TURN AWAY VENGEANCE WHEN IT CAME POUNDING AT THE DOOR.
UPON DYING, ONE OF THE COURTIERS HAD KNOCKED OVER A CANDLESTICK. OUT OF THE CORNER OF HIS EYE, DUSANG COULD SEE THE FIRE SPREADING THROUGHOUT THE CHAMBER.
IT DID NOT OCCUR TO HIM TO RUN.

SMOKE BILLOWED AND HEAVED IN GREAT BLACK CLOUDS
FLAMES LICKED AND AND LEAPED ABOUT HIM, A SHADOW DANCE OF PERDITION ITSELF
DUSANG SHOUTED INTO THE DARKNESS, TO WHATEVER IT WAS THAT MIGHT STILL BE THERE WATCHING HIM.
"LET JUDGMENT COME. I SHALL PAY THE TOLL FOR MY TRESSPASSES.
"BUT I MAKE NO APOLOGY! AND I RECOGNIZE NO SOVEREIGN.
"GOD IS A RIGHT CRUEL BASTARD AND NO BETTER THAN I."
HIS THROAT GROWING TIGHT AND CONSTRICTED, HIS EYES STINGING AND OVERFLOWING WITH TEARS, DUSANG COULD FEEL CONCIOUSNESS SLIPPING AWAY.
THE LAST THING HE HEARD WAS THE THUNDER CRACK OF TIMBERS BREAKING, AND THE GREAT, LOW RUMBLE OF STONES RAINING DOWN AROUND HIM...

AH, BUT THAT IS NOT THE END...DUSANG LIVED ON, A BROKEN AND BATTERED OLD SHELL OF A MAN TO BE SURE, BUT HE LIVED.
THEY SAY HE WANDERS THE ROADS, POOR WIZENED OLD TING, TALKING TO HIMSELF, MAD AS A JACKRABBIT. BUT HOW WOULD THEY KNOW, EH?
TRUTH BE TOLD, OLD DUSANG WAS NOT ONE TO --
AYE! WHERE ARE YOU GOING? GENTLEMEN, GOOD SIRS, I HAVE NOT FINISHED WITH MY TALE...
VERY WELL, BEGONE WITH YOU, PHILISTINES! DO YOU NOT KNOW A FINE TRAGEDY WHEN YOU SEE IT? FAH! YOU ARE BANISHED, THEN!
BUT I SHALL TELL YOU THIS...YOU'RE NOT GETTING YOUR MONEY BACK. NOT A FARTHING. NO SIR. I GAVE YOU A TALE, AND I SHALL TAKE MY TRADE.
EVERYTHING HAS ITS PRICE, EH, *MON AMI*?

Darkness